

INTERCESSORY PRAYER:
BIBLICAL CONCEPT AND CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION

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¹ This work is an abridged version of a Master thesis. For the material to be readable to wide audience, the author found it necessary to abridge some chapters and adapt the articles.

INTRODUCTION

“...the greatest intercession is to come directly to God with great zeal.”²

John Chrysostom

In recent years many Christian denominations have shown a special interest in the new “Great Prayer” movement. Peter Wagner, an evangelical preacher, writes the following in his book *Prayer Shield*, “Not many Christians paid attention to the new Great Prayer movement that has started to spread in Christian churches worldwide in the 70s. <...> Many Christian leaders nowadays remind us Joshua: they are very active in ministry; they are winners; they are successful God’s servants in the eyes of others. Day by day they witness God’s power working through them to bless others. But where does that power come from? It is released through intercession.”³ According to Peter Wagner “God’s power is released in the process of intercession.”⁴

An attempt to put intercessory prayer into the context of everyday life has led to the fact that it is turned into a personal or group recitation of current problems to God. Such attitude resulted in the quest of mediators who are entrusted with a role of “the explorers in the Kingdom of God.”⁵ As Richard Forster notes, “We do not need to observe Western culture very close to realize that it is captivated by the religion of a mediator.”⁶

² John Chrysostom, *Selective Interviews*, 264.

³ C. Peter Wagner, *Molitvennyi Schit (Prayer Shield)* (St. Petersburg: Bibleiski Vzglyad, 2009), 11, 19.

⁴ Wagner, *Prayer Shield*, c.23

⁵ Romano Guardini, *Prayer in practice* (N. Y.: Pantheon Books, 1957), 190.

⁶ Richard Forster, *Proslavleniye Distipliny (Celebration of Discipline)* (St. Petersburg: Bible for All, 2006), 12.

PRAYER AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

The image of God in human beings includes a very important characteristic given by God to people – the ability to communicate with their Creator. It is not just hearing some signals from above similar to those that govern instincts of animals, guide birds' migrations, or lead fish to the spawning grounds. Human beings have an ability to ask God questions and receive answers as did Adam, Enoch, Noah, Job and others. In order to commune with His creatures, God visited Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden “in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8).⁷ Because of such a close communion Enoch “walked with God” (Gen. 5:22) and it helped preserve him from the epidemic of “spiritual corruption” that befell the pre-flood human beings for “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.” (Gen. 6:5).

It is quite probable that from the very moment of the fall Satan made himself busy with uprooting from human consciousness the idea of a personal meeting with God, because devil knew that human ability to “walk with God” could guarantee protection against satanic influence.

The fear of meeting with God caused Adam to flee and hide from the Lord in Eden, “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). There are different alternatives offered for a meeting with God such as intercession of angels, priests, “saints,” etc. But all these attractively looking means cannot satisfy the hunger of human soul to meet God personally.

⁷ All citations of the Bible are given from the New International Version.

Besides the visible presence of God to communicate with His creatures, as it was in the Garden of Eden (Gen.18), we can find in the Bible another form of meeting with God. It is prayer. This is how early Christians perceived it. John Chrysostom (347 - 407 AD) wrote that “Prayer is a great act. If someone talking to a good man receives from him many benefits, then what benefits can be given to the person talking to God? For, prayer is a conversation with God.”⁸ Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD) also identified prayer “as conversation with God.”⁹ For John Chrysostom intercessory prayer was a possibility to address God directly, “God is more inclined to answer when we ask Him directly, not through others. He often retains His gift not because He wants us to become desperate, but because He wants to be the Initiator of more blessings for us.”¹⁰

Origen (185-254 AD) compares God with a loving father who protects his little children without waiting for their request, because they do not know how to ask, or he ignores their frequent requests to receive what will not benefit them. Origen contemplates, “What prayer did Jacob offer before he was born, that it should be prophesied of him that "he shall prevail" over Esau, and that his brother shall serve him?”¹¹

If prayer is “conversation with God”¹², as John Chrysostom defined it, and according to Friedrich Heiler “to be human means to pray”¹³, it is quite possible that

⁸ John Chrysostom, *Selective Interviews*, 171.

⁹ Ephrem the Syrian. *Izbrannye Mest is Tvoreni Sv. Efrema Sirina (Selected Passages from St. Ephrem the Syrian)* (St. Petersburg: Sinodal Tipografiya, 1891), 6.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Selective Interviews*, 263.

¹¹ Origen. *On Prayer*, The Library of Christian Classics. Alexandrian Christianity, v.2. - (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 249.

¹² John Chrysostom, *Selective Interviews*, 171.

¹³ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 103.

Jesus intentionally included the discussion of prayer in His Sermon of the Mountain, “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men” (Matt. 6:5). Then He identified a very important principle of prayer, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt. 6:7-8).

Though prayer was an integral part of all religions, not just Judaism, there was an essential difference. Pagans thought that “they will be heard because of their many words”, but Jesus called God’s people the blessed because they were able to *hear* His voice. “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). When people lost their susceptibility to His voice, God warned them about that through His prophets “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isa. 29:13). Probably that was the main problem of those who lived during the first coming of Christ: prayer ceased to be a dialogue with God, when “in prayer move both, God and man”.¹⁴ It turned to be a monologue, a long speech of constant complain, lamenting or asking God about something, leaving no room to hear Him to put His two cents into the conversation.

A dialogue assumes participation and interaction. When we pray, God is coming out of His transcendent existence. The Infinite and the finite meet each other, covering a deep gap in between. The word *adeha* is used to identify the ideal

¹⁴ Sidur, “*Vrata Molitvy*” na Budli, Subbotu i Prazdniki (“*Prayer Gates*” for Weekdays, Sabbath, and Holidays) (Moscow: Makhanaim: Joint, 1993), 238.

communication during prayer (*to Thee, up to Thee*). It means that the distance is covered and the gap is bridged.¹⁵

Prayer is the special state of mind and a process of molding yourself along the dialogue with God. Prayer is the most important tool for personal spiritual development, which leads to recognition of God's sovereign power over the world and through this, paves a path to learning this world.

Prayer is compared to a "breath of soul."¹⁶ If an individual stops breathing, he or she can start receiving "artificial respiration"; but it will last for a short period, then they have to breathe independently. No one can breathe for another person.

PRAYERFUL MEDITATION

As Jacques B. Doukhan said "The prayer has no value by itself. Words, no matter how true and beautiful, have no magical power to force God into action."¹⁷

The authentic prayer calls for meditation over different topics such as good and evil, joy and sorrow, order of the universe, search for internal motives. Nothing escapes prayerful contemplation, because in the presence of the One, who knows everything, before we ask, soul receives peace (see Job 39, 40). Internal peace does not mean detachment from what is happening around. On the contrary, it includes the ability for careful and concentrated attention to the Interlocutor, the readiness to any unexpected turn in the conversation at any moment. In some situations you might hear a denial of your petition, and it should be humbly accepted. In other cases, a person

¹⁵ Ibid, 31.

¹⁶ Ellen G. White. *Vesti Dlya Molodezhi (Messages For Young People)* (Zaoksky: Life Source, 1998), 249.

¹⁷ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald Publ. Assoc., 2002), 139.

may hear a call to action that requires a certain reaction and even sacrifice. Thus, every time a new component will be brought into relationships, whether feelings, words or actions.

The discipline of meditation was known to the authors of the Scriptures. Richard Foster writes that “There are two different Hebrew words in the Bible to present this idea, all together used 58 times.”¹⁸ The meanings of these words are: listening to God’s word, meditating about God’s deeds and God’s Law. The psalmist exclaims, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. ... I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word” (Ps. 119:97, 101). “[Isaac] went out to the field one evening to meditate...» (Gen. 24:63). “On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night” (Ps. 63:6). The Psalm which opens the whole collection, calls to imitate the blessed man, whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2).

Since God is a real Person able to interact with an individual (in the Gospels there are many stories about Christ communicating with people), then prayer becomes a creative process including: questions to God (Mark 9:28; John 13:37), expression of personal opinion (Matt. 17:4), or even disagreement with Him (Matt. 16:22). Even though a prayer is prepared in advance – if it is not a sample prayer illustrating a specific genre – and a person knows what he/she will ask or speak about, there is no assurance concerning God’s answer. This ignorance implies some uncertainty in the further development of a dialogue, making interaction unique. Otherwise prayer would have turned into a mechanical, pre-programmed speech, and people were not able for independent creative process.

¹⁸ Richard Forster, *Proslavlenieh Distsipliny (Celebration of Discipline)* (St. Petersburg: Bible for All, 2006), 7.

Internal world of a Christian will be weak, unprotected and disorganized if a serious attention is not given to the training of mind and intellect. Some Christians mistakenly consider accumulation of facts, knowledge of the doctrinal teachings and rules, memorization of Bible verses as the final result of their brain work. But, when they face a difficult situation or complicated question, they feel vulnerable, uncomfortable, and scared to show their individuality starting to think. It is easier for them to use stereotyped phrases and answers, or sample prayers.

Often, such people become victims of manipulation or fraud because they are not accustomed to think independently. They limited development of their mind to acceptance of information. But, besides obtaining information, human mind has other characteristics such as logic or judgment. It is easy to be trapped when there are so many powerful people around you, who are ready to think for you. A dialogue with God is a mean which helps build correct logical links regarding things happening around, leading you away from deceptions and errors caused by both external factors and internal temptations.

Meditation is an amazing ability given by God to human beings making them able to discover, observe, analyze and discern, compare and contrast, put old truth into new words and forms, helping others to see possibilities of its application in daily life. While meditating, people learn to make bold decisions and overcome obstacles by means unknown previously. God often uses a brief description of His principles, suggesting reading between lines and discussing discoveries with Him. He fosters free, thinking people, but not slaves who wait for step-by-step instructions. Nobody can draw a separating line between thinking and praying, and say here the thought ends and prayer begins; or classify those two mind processes which lead to

knowledge and cognition. It is hardly possible to differentiate between prayer and meditation.

Meditation should be a prelude to prayer, its accompaniment and the final chord.

A key-note of intercessory prayer can be formulated in words of Douglas Hall, “prayer in the name of Jesus means thinking our way into God’s world.”¹⁹ Prayerful meditation does not assume disorganized and dreamy state of mind. Douglas Hall says, “Prayerful thinking is thinking -in-relationship.”²⁰ That is why the biblical epistles often mention “prayer in spirit” or “prayer by Spirit” (Eph. 6:18). Moses, after many hesitations and doubts, learned to hear God’s voice and obey His word. The Scripture says that the LORD spoke to Moses “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Exod. 33:11). It was a feeling of personal interaction and spiritual connection. But the Israelites were not ready to such communion. As soon as they learned something about God, they understood that His presence was dangerous. That is why they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Exod. 20:19). They wanted to look religious without carrying out certain obligations. God’s presence always brings a sense of responsibility. We are responsible, first of all, for our reaction to what was seen, heard or experienced.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF PRAYER IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

It is important to notice that intercession among early Christians assumed practical participation of a mediator in the community life. The Early Church defined intercession as an Episcopal right given by secular authorities to bishops of the Early

¹⁹ Douglas John Hall, *When You Pray* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1987), 86.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

Church to stand up for criminals. The reference to that can be found in the Seventh Canon of the Council of Sardis. Both Augustine and Jerome mention about that, as well as Socrates in his Church History.²¹

We can read that “St. Augustine repeatedly interceded for criminals with Macedonius, who was then the governor of Africa. Martin of Tours interceded with Emperor Maximus for the imprisoned Priscillianists in 384-385; and Bishop Flavian of Antioch interceded with Emperor Theodosius I in 387 on behalf of the inhabitants of Antioch, who had thoughtlessly destroyed the imperial statue in that city. St. Ambrose induced Emperor Theodosius I to enact a law which forbade the execution of the death penalty and the confiscation of property until thirty days after sentence had been passed. It was the purpose of this law to leave room for clemency and to prevent the punishing of the innocent.”²²

In order to intercede for prisoners, the bishops had a free access to prisons. They were even suggested to do visitation on Wednesdays and Saturdays for investigation of criminals’ cases and warning prison guards to treat prisoners with Christian mercy. If guards behaved brutally or carelessly, the bishops had to report those violations to the Emperor. “The rights of the bishops, which were almost unlimited in this respect, were somewhat regulated for the bishops of the Eastern Empire in "Codex Justinian"; for the bishops of the Western Empire in the "Edicta Theoderici".”²³

The intercessory practice of bishops was closely connected with their barrister’s practice as well as the right and obligation to protect orphans, widows and other destitute. “Thus Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, interceded with Emperor

²¹ The Catholic Encyclopedia: Intercession. (London: The Encyclopedia Press Inc.,1913. V. VIII), 72-73.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Pulcheria in behalf of the poor of his diocese, who were overladen with taxes; the Third Council of Carthage, held in 399, requested the emperor to accede to the wishes of the bishops by appointing advocates to plead the causes of the poor before the courts, while the Council of Macon, held in 585, forbade all civil authorities to begin judicial proceedings against widows and orphans without previously notifying the bishop of the diocese to which the accused belonged.”²⁴

Thus, it can be suggested that intercession in the Early Church was associated with practical actions of a mediator and his active participation in the social life of the community. Intercession could be presented in the form of a petition or request given personally, orally, or in a written form through others. The principle of praying and acting, or rather, in prayerful dialogue asking God for guidance, was used by many biblical characters. For example, the prophet Samuel says, “As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23a). Then he explains that his prayer has a dynamic development and accomplishes with instructions to his people, “I will teach you the way that is good and right” (1 Sam. 12:23b).

Prayer and teaching were integral parts of Samuel’s ministry. In order that his admonitions have the authority God empowers Samuel to be a judge. “Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah... From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places” (1Sam. 7:6, 16). Samuel’s ministry had a specific consistency: first, prayer (in the form of a cry, plea, or an expression of concern), then judging and teaching of the Israelites ‘in all places.’

Thus we see that Samuel not only presents a request to God. It can be assumed that this wise man listened to God carefully while praying, in order to catch Lord’s

²⁴ Ibid.

advice about teaching and judging. This pattern of praying and listening to God's answer is seen in the following passage, "so he *prayed* to the LORD. And the LORD *told* him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1Sam. 8:6-7).

When David had to solve important strategic tasks, he followed the same pattern. In prayer he sought God's advice regarding his actions, "So David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you" (2 Sam. 5:19). On another occasion God advises David to change his offensive tactics, "so David inquired of the LORD, and he answered, "Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees" (2 Sam. 5:23).

Christ could discuss details and plans of His mission with the Father in all-night prayers. Then in the morning He went to people to fulfill them (see Luke 6:12-13). Ellen White in her book *The Desire of Ages* mentioned the goal of Jesus' solitude, "He went away to the sanctuary of the mountains for communion with His Father. Often He passed the entire night in prayer and meditation, returning at daybreak to His work among the people".²⁵

Commenting on intercessory prayer Douglas Hall writes, "When it comes to the responsible representation of our world in prayer, the saying is true that "tears are not enough." It requires also knowledge, wisdom, discernment, awareness, research and disciplined, vigilant study."²⁶ Then he makes a conclusion, "The life of prayer and the life of discernment and study are not two different lives, alternatives from which

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da26.html> (January 09, 2015).

²⁶ Hall, *When You Pray*, 86.

the elect are free to choose. They are the part of the same life process, the unceasing prayer of thinking our way into God's world."²⁷

Before asking God something, we should sit and think prayerfully.

Intercessory prayer should be thought out.

AN AMAZING EXAMPLE OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (Bloom) writes, "Usually we understand prayer requests as our reminder to God about things He forgot to complete. In reality it is a step forward to present ourselves in the center of the tragic situation...from which there is no escape for us."²⁸ Once in the center of the drama or becoming a witness to it, a person can hear the question as the answer to his/her prayer, similar to one heard by Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?" (Isa. 6:8). It is rather a rhetorical question which should be followed by the answer, "Here am I. Send me!"

Authentic intercessory prayer can be dangerous. It can lead us into the heart of events and direct to the ways, on roadsides of which many have lost their lives.

The Metropolitan Anthony in his book *School for Prayer* recorded an amazing story dating from the 1917—1922 Civil War in Russia which can be considered as a stunning example of intercessory prayer:

In a small provincial town, that had just moved from one military party to another, a young woman of 25 with two little children got into a trap. Her husband belonged to the enemy camp; she was unable to escape on time. She is in hiding hoping that there will come a moment when those who seek to kill her and her children will relax their attention and she can try to escape. The day passed in fear and followed by night, then another day. By the evening of the second day the door of a shack where she was hiding, opened and a young woman of her age, her neighbor, a representative of common people came in. She asked "Are you such and such?" And the mother answered with fear "Yes." "You were detected, and tonight they will come for you to shoot. You have to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *Shkola Molitvy (School for Prayer)* (Клин: Fund «Christian Life», 2001), 6.

run.” But the mother looked at her children and answered “Where should I run? It’s impossible to escape with children. They can’t go fast and far, we’ll be recognized easily!” And that neighbor who was a stranger a few seconds before, suddenly ceases to be just a neighbor, and turns to become the great, majestic one, who the Gospel calls ‘neighbor,’ the closest one, so much close that there is nobody closer than her. The woman said “Nobody will look for you. I will stay here instead of you.” “But you will be shot!” The woman answered. “Yes! But I do not have children.” And the mother and children left. But before that the mother asked a question, “What is your name?” And all we know about that woman, about her past, her personality is her name: Natalia.²⁹

This story is an exact illustration of what the *act* of intercession is in contrast to an intercessory *plea*.

The night is falling, cold autumn night, enveloping her with loneliness. That young woman is alone, isolated from others and cannot wait for anything except death. She faces that approaching death which is not hers. She is young and alive, and it was not she whom they intended to kill.³⁰

Let us remember the Gethsemane. It was a cold and dark night; there was the young Man a little over thirty, far from friends who were tired, sad and sleeping. He was expecting a coming death, waited to be killed for others because He agreed on that, thus giving every person an opportunity to leave that night that held Him as a prisoner. From the Scriptures we know that Christ cried out to His Father and blood dropped from His forehead; we know about the terror He felt; we know that in unbearable loneliness He was left one-to-one to face His death, which was not His, but the other's death; an absurd, “senseless” death.

Nataliya from the story was in the same situation, she was in Christ’s place.

Probably more than once had Natalia gone to the door, looked out and thought, “I can just open it and will not be Zoya anymore, but Nataliya again. And I do not need to face death, nobody will abuse me.” But she did not go out. And probably the young woman had asked herself more than once whether her death was useful. If the mother and children would escape, it would be useful, but, if not? It would be horrible, tragic nonsense if they would be caught and she would be shot! Nataliya did not receive any answer that time. Only now she could have

²⁹ Ibid., 391-394.

³⁰ Ibid.

learned that Zoya escaped and her children are over fifty. But she never knew this, she was shot that night.³¹

The novel *Quo Vadis* by Polish author Henryk Sienkiewicz describes the historical fact of the first persecution of Christians. Trying to escape it, Peter leaves Rome and meets Christ at the city gates. He asks a question, “Quo vadis, Domine?” (Where are you going, Lord?). Christ answers him, “I am going to Rome to die with My brothers because you have left them.”³²

Intercession is real, but it is real only if it is implemented in a responsible and active position. “We keep on talking about involvement of different kind – political, social, etc. – but stay irresponsible themselves. In one case we are responsibly involved, but in the next one we irresponsibly move away. We are involved for a little while ... for some time! But then, when we are tired of suffering, we say to the one who is in the epicenter of it, “Go ahead! But I need to take some rest. After that I will be back to support you.”³³

God is faithful to His covenant with people (see Gen. 3:15) because the promise “never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5) is an essential part of His nature. God *per se* will never leave and will never forsake because He is always in the center of drama (Isa. 43:2). As Jacques Doukhan said, God’s love “does not lock Himself in Heaven. To save others from the fire, the God of love must Himself pass through. (Dan.3:25).”³⁴

³¹ Ibid.

³² Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Kamo Gryadesheh (Quo Vadis?)* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2006), 267-268.

³³ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *School for Prayer*, 395.

³⁴ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 54.

But we are not able to intercede because we “stand on the shore and ask God to save the sinking boat.”³⁵

INTERCESSORY PRAYERS OF MOSES

Moses stands out among other biblical characters; he often assumes the role of a mediator. Undoubtedly, Moses is a great hero of faith, who gives us an outstanding example how to pray. Quite obvious that the most striking example of Moses intercessory prayer is his request for pardoning the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, when they made the golden calf at Sinai.

I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?... Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened (Exod. 32:9-11, 14).

Referring to the story, some scholars ascribe Moses the role of a peacemaker, who restrains the wrath of a righteous God and prevents the destruction of his people by God Yahweh. Some theologians assert that in the story it was Moses who exemplified an intercessor and his “bold intercession – according to W. Brueggemann – recovered the Covenant.”³⁶ After complaints about Israel, Yahweh offers Moses a significant alternative plan: He will destroy too obstinate people, and create a new nation, which the only ancestor will be Moses. But Moses “does not

³⁵ Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, *School for Prayer*, 395

³⁶ Walter Bruggeman, *Velikie Molitvy Vetkhogo Zaveta* (Great Prayers of the Old Testament) (Moscow: Eksmo, 2009), 57.

want to take part in such an ‘eternal triangle’ and finally cares for Israel more than Yahweh Himself.”³⁷ – concludes Brueggemann.

The context of the whole story of relationship between God and humans speaks about steadfast, stable and reliable faithfulness of God, who is longsuffering, merciful and ready to forgive. We cannot argue on the basis of the biblical text quoted above that the salvation of the people depended on the petition of Moses. It is hard to imagine that if Moses had agreed with God that His “anger may destroy them” (Exod. 32:10), it would have caused the destruction of all the Israelites, including many innocent people among them. Not all people worshiped the golden calf: at least the Levites and their families remained faithful to God.

It can hardly be assured that there have been found a phenomenological approach to rescue people from God's wrath when the result depends on the persistent requests of another person (or group of individuals). Let us presume that there is no “Moses” in the community. Does it mean that people are doomed to death, because nobody is able to plead for God’s forgiveness?

God’s judgment about fate of any individual, as well as entire nations is conducted in the Supreme Heavenly Court. This judgment is true, righteous and balanced (Rev.19:2; Ps. 51:4; 119:137). Though God, taking into account people’s imperfection, discusses with humans the legal process (see Gen. 18:22-33), He alone makes the final decision (see John 5:22). The Bible does not describe intercession of Noah, Enoch and other righteous people concerning the fate of the pre-flood world. It is not because they were senseless to the perishing humanity or were not able to beg for God’s forgiveness because of the lack of faith, but because they had a different

³⁷ Ibid., 58.

understanding of God's character and His participation in the salvation of human beings.

The following two aspects will help us understand the cause-and-effect relationship between intercessory prayer of Moses and the actions of Yahweh.

1. God tested Moses

Ellen White in *Patriarchs and Prophets* wrote, "God had proved His servant; He had tested his faithfulness and his love to those erring, ungrateful people, and nobly had Moses endured the trial... God was pleased with his faithfulness, his simplicity of heart, and his integrity, and He committed to him, as a faithful shepherd, the great charge of leading Israel to the Promised Land."³⁸

The test of Moses was over. But Moses did not know that it was a test as well as Job did not know the reason for his sufferings. It is *now* we know that "one day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them" (Job1:6). Now we know about the dialogue between God and Satan, regarding the further fate of Job. But Job himself went humbly through trials and revelations of God's character, and he passed that way with dignity, just as Moses did (Job 42:12-17).

That is why after all those events at Sinai the Lord shows "his glory" to Moses and says of Himself as "The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6), thus helping to understand that He feels the same way as Moses, when the Israelites constantly grumble at Him. But, His "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

Next time when the Israelites start grumbling about God, and Moses acts as an intercessor, these very God's characteristics Moses will give as reasons for

³⁸ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp28.html> (January 11, 2015).

pardoning, “may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion’” (Num. 14:17-18).

In the first case Moses refers to God's promise to Abraham to give the land to Israel, “Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them’” (Exod. 32:13). In the second case Moses understands that God cannot but show mercy, because it is an essential part of His character. Such prayer is backed up with the relationships of trust. Moses is no longer a stranger bringing a new idea to God, but he is a tested and trustworthy coworker and Yahweh’s agent.

2. God is the Ultimate Judge for Sinners

The following texts show that Yahweh’s reaction is disproportionate to hope of Moses and his ardent request. It might look that He answered only partially to the prayer request, and the final decision about sinners’ fate is not good news, “The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made” (Exod. 32:31-35).

In spite of Moses intercession, God strikes people with a plague and this destruction will be repeated during their journey through the desert, until those who have not repented of idolatry, called “fornication”, will be exterminated completely, “Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert” (Num. 14:33).

Thus, the Lord makes an independent judgment and His judgment is true and balanced. It is not influenced by human emotions which are unstable and varied. No matter how strong and outstanding Moses was, but even his nerves were stretched to breaking. In one case he was willing to put his life for the people, but in the other we can clearly hear some anger and discontent with his mission, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?” (Num. 11:11-12).

The Moses of the end of the journey in the desert differed from the Moses who led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery at the beginning. When the Lord reveals to Moses just before his death the future of the Israelites, that they will leave God and He will need to take extreme measures to stop them, Moses obediently listens to it and accepts the news (Deut. 31:16-17). He no longer shows any boisterous reaction and does not have a desire to hold the hand of God from His righteous anger. He is not pleading God to spare his people. Moses learned a lot during those passed years, including the most important lesson – an ability to hear God, understand Him and trust Him.

In his closing song Moses says the following about God’s deeds, “A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deut. 32:4). The important phrase is “who does *no* wrong.” Moses did not make any reservation, e.g. “God is just, except for one case, when He wanted to destroy the Israelites”, but Moses interfered. By that time Moses knew quite well from Whom originated the initiative to punish or pardon.

The success of Moses’ intercessory prayer is associated first of all with the unique ability of this man to respond to God's call in spite of the internal resistance,

ability to love his people and be in the thick of events forgetting all the pain they had caused him. These were the qualities God appreciated the most. As for the fact when “mercy triumphs over judgment” or “judgment without mercy” (Jas. 2:13), the final word has always been God’s.

In order to follow the example of Moses’ intercession for his people, we need to take the responsibility to walk a long way from Egypt to Canaan throughout forty years. This does not imply shifting of the initiative to the mediator and challenging God’s plans. Yahweh always answers prayers, but He responds with the inherent freedom and wisdom.

ABRAHAM INTERCESSION FOR SODOM AND GOMORRA

The common tradition proved by the New Testament considers Abraham an example of faith (see Rom. 4:16-25, Gal. 3:6-9). This man has believed God (Gen. 15:6) so much, that was on the edge of sacrificing his own son upon God’s command (Gen. 22:12). Relationships between Abraham and Lot illustrate generosity of the former to his relatives and at the same time demonstrate the richness of soul of the patriarch and founder of Israel.

Sodom where Lot lives is filled with the “sin so grievous” that cause the “great outcry against them.” The narrative does not give an explanation what the “great outcry” is about, but usually in the Bible it arises because of oppression, injustice or exploitation (Exod. 2:23; Jas. 5:4), sometimes because of a personal cruelty (Gen. 4:10).

In the story we can see that Abraham and Yahweh share with each other their secret thoughts as if they were the “best friends”, thus the prophet Isaiah indicated that on behalf of God, “Abraham my friend” (Is. 41:8). But Brueggemann points out

that there is one thing that can force to place Abraham not as a "respectful suppliant before God", but as an "elder".³⁹

Brueggemann draws attention to the fact that “verse 22 contains a “copyist’s correction” and here NRSV refers to “another ancient tradition.” That alternative tradition makes us read the text differently, “Yahweh stood in front of Abraham.” In this case the roles are reversed: Abraham is a kingpin and Yahweh is a respected petitioner; here, Abraham is superior to Yahweh who approaches him with reverence, taking off his hat.”⁴⁰

Then Brueggemann adds that “it makes us reconsider the “prayer relationship” and how we can come to God, either as respected petitioners – what we usually do – or as seniors in our interaction.”⁴¹

Even if we agree that the alternative translation allows us to read the text differently (“Yahweh stood in front of Abraham”), it does not make Abraham a ‘senior.’ Christ in the Gospels often assumes a role of a servant (see Matt. 20:28; Mark10:45), but this does not allow people to reverse roles with God and to take the initiative into their own hands. In the Gospel of John 13 Jesus was not just standing in front of His disciples. He knelt down in front of them and washed their feet remaining their Teacher. In the following chapters He will be teaching and comforting them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me” (John 14:1; see also 14-17).

Brueggemann compares the dialogue between Abraham and God with the auction to find the best price from all the possible, “The tone of it reminds the scenes in the Middle East market where bargaining is a part of the game. This makes us to conclude that there is something from the game in prayer. Yahweh gave in to the

³⁹ Brueggemann, *Great Prayers*, 42.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁴¹ Ibid.

arguments of Abraham and now two sides are immersed in a classical Jewish situation of a deal at optimal conditions... and the fate of the world is in an unstable equilibrium and depends on the outcome of the negotiations.”⁴²

But there was no such an “auction” in the history of the pre-flood world when Noah was “bargaining” with God the number of saved in the ark, before God destroyed the humanity. The history of the Exodus also does not describe such negotiations. Nowhere you can find Moses and Aaron discussing with God how many saved would be in Canaan which the Israelites were to conquer (see Deut. 2:34).

The dispute between Abraham and God showed that God was ready to discuss salvation of others. Moreover, He persuades us to do whatever is possible for the salvation of others. But our participation in the salvation of neighbors does not assume “bargaining with God for the best price” of the sinner. When Christ revealed to His disciples their role in the salvation of the people around them, He gave them a clear command what to do, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Paul once said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! » (1 Cor. 9:16). The ability of some people to protect others from God's judgment is not in begging God for mercy to the sinner. God is merciful by His nature (Ezek. 18:32). This ability is in preaching the Good News, which opens the way to salvation.

Another important detail of the story helps us to see the process of the thorough investigation before sentencing. The angel says to Lot “But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it” (Gen.19:22). God cannot destroy the city until even one righteous is not in a safe place.

⁴² Ibid., 42.

Abraham's prayer in the atmosphere of the triumph of sin can be compared with Jesus' prayer on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). It was a cry out of the heart expressing the pain caused by compassion for His executors, who did not understand the terrible consequences of their act. But that prayer did not cancel God's just verdict, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him" (Rev. 1:7).

Every person is of great value to God; that is why He cherishes and protects everyone. God is love (1John 4:16) and the important characteristics of His love are patience and mercy, which permeate the human history. His love has nothing to do with human anger fueled by negative emotions, irritation and hasty decisions. God's wrath is righteous and deliberate. God does not destroy "in bulk" because somebody just ran into a squall of His anger. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER OF JEREMIAH

Once, Jeremiah tried to intercede for the people, probably without considering the situation carefully. Therefore God answered him, "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you" (Jer. 7:16, see Jer. 15:1-2).

Carl F. Keil writes the following commenting the text, "The purport of ver. 16, that God will not suffer Himself to be moved by any entreaties to revoke the doom pronounced on the wicked people, is expressed by way of a command from God to the prophet not to pray for the people. <...> "urge me not" cuts off all hope of success

from even the most importunate intercession. The reason for this command to desist is shown in ver. 17.”⁴³

Andrew W. Blackwood adds, “The disease is too far advanced for even the Devine Physician to cure it.”⁴⁴ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* defines the failed attempt of Jeremiah to plead for God’s mercy through intercession this way, “Since the nation refused to reform, nothing could turn aside the doom that was coming. The chastisement and discipline must be allowed to do its work. Intercessory prayer to avert the threatened judgments would be unavailing (See. Jer.11:14; 14:11-12; 15:1).”⁴⁵

In the *Commentary of the Anglican Church* you can read, “man’s prayer may not stop the course of the divine justice.”⁴⁶

The way Yahweh responded to Jeremiah’s prayer suggests that by that time Israel had an established practice of intercessory prayer that did not comply with God’s rules. Probably they borrowed that practice from people around them as they borrowed a practice of fasting that was condemned by God in the Book of Isaiah (Isa. 58:2-8). Walter Eichrodt, a famous Protestant theologian, distinguishes some traces of pagan attributes in the religious practice of Israel:

The use of the verbs *hitpallel*, strictly ‘to make cuts in oneself’ and *hilla*, to stroke (Ex.32:11; 1Sam.13:12; I Kings13:6) recalls ancient customs of prayer in which the person praying wounded himself in order to attract the attention of the deity (I Kings 18:28), or touched the image or symbol of the God with his hands or lips (Ex.17:16; Hos.13:2), though naturally this proves nothing as to whether these particular meanings of the words were still present to the consciousness of

⁴³ Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Fourth Book of Moses*. (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc, 1984. V.2), 629-630

⁴⁴ Andrew W. Blackwood, *Commentary on Jeremiah* (Texas: Waco, 1977), 93.

⁴⁵ The Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible: Isaiah to Malachi. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 1977. V.4, 388

⁴⁶ Frederick Charles Cook, *The Holy Bible, According to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611): With an Explanatory and Critical Commentary and a Revision of the Translation by Bishops and Other Clergy of the Anglican Church*. New York: Scribner's, 1890, 372.

Yahweh worshippers in their prayers. Even the custom of stretching out the hands may originally have had magical significance (Ex.17:11; cf. the Babylonian prayers linked with lifting up of the hands).⁴⁷

Commenting on the practice of intercessory prayer in Israel, Eichrodt comes to the conclusion, “it is ultimately the will of Yahweh which determines the scope of the blessing, where formerly the tendency had been to ascribe this to the particular intercessor (Ex.32:32; I Sam.15:11; Jer.15:1-2).”⁴⁸

There were times in the history of Israel when even prayerful intercession of the whole nation was not able to receive what they asked for, “You came back and wept before the LORD, but he paid no attention to your weeping and turned a deaf ear to you” (Deut. 1:45). Failed intercessory prayers of the priests continued after the return from the Babylonian captivity. “The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of testimony were not found there. No sign from heaven made known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah.”⁴⁹

PRAYERS OF DANIEL AND ELIJAH (DAN 9; 1 KINGS 18)

Despite some reservations in the Judeo-Christian polemic, the prophecies of Daniel remain the subject of serious and in-depth study by Christian and Jewish scholars. According to Josephus, Judaism recognized Daniel as one of the greatest prophets. The great scientist Isaac Newton has also taken notice of the book of Daniel⁵⁰, and the composers of the twentieth century dedicated to it their music opuses

⁴⁷ Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*. V.1. (London: SCM Press, 1975), 172-173.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ellen White, *Prophecies and Kings*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pk/pk48.html> (January 14, 2015).

⁵⁰ Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733).

which became masterpieces for many years.⁵¹ The Book of Daniel captivates the minds and thoughts of intellectuals and can rightly be called the book of wisdom, which tells about the history, culture and religion in the context of the time.

One of the most striking examples of Daniel's intercessory prayer is his prayer for Israel, when he was in the Babylonian captivity (Dan. 9). Taking into account the domination of the Babylonian Empire it can be suggested that Daniel was concerned with the following painful question, "What is the future of his nation?" Daniel and his compatriots did not wait for any good from the Empire, which power was hostile to the identity and customs of the conquered peoples, including the customs of the Jews.

In his prayer Daniel refers to Jer. 25:11-12 and 29:10, where the prophet mentions a seventy-year period of the people captivity. The time limit indicates that the resettlement of people into Babylon will become a reality, to reckon with, because it will be long-continued. But at the same time it gives hope, because the period indicates limitation of that disaster in time and promises the return of the Jews. Israel will not remain in exile forever.

What has prompted Daniel to pray for the restoration of Jerusalem and the sanctuary? Did he doubt that God after seventy years of Babylonian captivity would visit Israel and fulfill His promise to lead His people and bring them back to Judea? C. Keil comments, "Certainly not, since neither the matter of his prayer, nor the divine revelation which was vouchsafed to him in answer to his prayer, indicated any doubt on his part regarding the divine promise."⁵² Jacques Doukhan supposes that "the preceding vision had a disappointing aftertaste. For an instant Daniel could have jumped to the conclusion that the devastation of Jerusalem was to last 2,300 years.

⁵¹ The Daniel Jazz by Louis Gruenberg (orchestral piece) and by Herbert Chappell (A short vocal work suitable for performance by schoolchildren).

⁵² Keil, *The Old Testament Commentaries*, V.3, 322-323

But after consulting the book of Jeremiah he finds himself reassured. The exile would not exceed 70 years (Jer.29:10-12).⁵³

In verses 20 and 21 the narrator uses the expression “while I was still in prayer.” It means that the answer was instant. It also means that God did not need time to weigh and consider the request of Daniel. He responds immediately and substantially, although the answer given by God’s messenger is not entirely consistent with the request of Daniel. Arthur G. Keough comments, “God’s response indicates that while the earthly Jerusalem and its Temple were important, the coming of the Messiah was even *more* vital. <...> Perhaps Daniel’s prayer indicates that we human beings have small visions, however right they may be. But God sees far beyond the immediate present. Daniel worried about the welfare of his own people, while God had in mind the welfare of the whole world.”⁵⁴

The Archangel Gabriel reveals to Daniel that Yahweh’s help is sufficient to overcome current tribulations. It goes further than the Babylonian captivity and coming liberation. God is at the helm concerning time and events in time, He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10).

Daniel’s prayer is an example of deep concern about his people, it is a pain that has been living in the heart for a long time and finally finds its way out as a groan, crying and pleading. Of course, God saw that pain and valued it, but liberation of Israel depended not only on the internal experience of Daniel. It included a range of events and processes within the whole nation of Israel and in the heart of every individual. In addition, the liberation of Israel was connected with political, economic and social events of the mankind with the center in the Babylonian Empire at that

⁵³ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 136.

⁵⁴ Arthur G. Keough, *Let Daniel Speak* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assoc., 1986), 98.

time. To understand those processes and events in depth can God alone, He is the only One who is able to control them because He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). It means that we can assume that the course of history is not submitted to intercessory prayer of an individual, no matter how well-intentioned he may be. “Not even the greatest minds can comprehend the magnitude of God’s truth. – Arthur Keough writes – God responds, not in the limited way that our mind works, but in the unlimited ways of His grace.”⁵⁵

A “man’s prayer may not stop the course of the divine justice.”⁵⁶

Elijah

The story of the prophet Elijah is perhaps the most arresting example of how an individual can be both the tool in God’s hands and the initiator of certain events and actions that God performs at his request. At least it looks like that, “Now Elijah... said to Ahab, "...there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (1 Kgs. 17:1). And really, there was no rain. After a while “Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain” (1 Kgs. 18:41), and it started to rain again.

There are many stories when people, including church ministers, prayed during the drought about a rain, following the example of the prophet Elijah. But unfortunately, not always God answered their prayers and sent rain. Of course, it is impossible to give a comprehensive answer why God does not act the way people want Him to, even if they follow the best intentions. The careful study of the events relating to the story of Elijah, his prayers and God's action will help clarify important principles and avoid self-confidence in our requests and prayers in the future.

⁵⁵ Keough, *Let Daniel Speak*, 98-99.

⁵⁶ Frederick Charles Cook, *The Holy Bible, According to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611): With an Explanatory and Critical Commentary and a Revision of the Translation by Bishops and Other Clergy of the Anglican Church*. New York: Scribner's, 1890, 372.

First of all, we should pay attention to the words of the prophet at the end of the story, “At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command” (1 Kgs. 18:36). The phrase “have done all these things at your command” points out that the initiator of this event was God, while Elijah fulfilled His plan. That is why C. Keil writes, “This clearly expresses not only the object of the miracle which follows, but that of miracles universally. The perfects are used to denote not only what has already occurred, but what will still take place and is as certain as if it had taken place already.”⁵⁷

According to the *Commentary of the Anglican Church*, Elijah wanted to say through his prayer “That I have been divinely directed in all that I have done publicly as a prophet, in proclaiming the drought, in gathering this assembly, and in proposing this trial; that I have not done them of my own mind (Compare. Num.16:28).”⁵⁸

The Pulpit Commentary also links those events with the previous God's revelation, “Not only the earlier proceedings of the day, but the three years' drought etc.” (17:2. 3, 8, 16, 24; 18:1).⁵⁹

It is obvious that before Elijah asked God to send fire on the sacrifice and then provide rain in the harassing heat, God revealed him His plans, which included a coming drought, contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmil, and Elijah's victory over them.

⁵⁷ Keil, *The Old Testament Commentaries*, V.2, 712

⁵⁸ Cook, *The Holy Bible*, 594.

⁵⁹ The Pulpit Commentary: I Kings. II Kings (New York and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls, 1913. V. VI), 426

John Grey adds that Elijah's prayer was intentionally prolonged to switch people's attention from the prophet to the One who was behind him, "Elijah's prayer may have been deliberately prolonged in anticipation of rain. Elijah's appeal to God to let it be known that he was God's servant and did all things at his word corrects the impression, already perhaps part of the popular tradition, that he himself had special efficacy. It is, moreover, a feature of the tradition of the authentication of the divine authority of a prophet by a 'sign', or token of God's immediate activity."⁶⁰

Intercession as a habit of life, sometimes called "prayer of faith" assumes a condition of permanent prayer to God for His guidance. We should hear, know and obey God's will before we start praying about any event. Prayer for guidance always precedes a prayer of faith and accompanies it. Richard Foster thinks that "if we stay silent, we will be able to understand not only God's character, but His way of acting."⁶¹

MEANING OF THE WORD '*INTERCESSOR*' IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ⁶²

In the New Testament the word *intercession* (Greek *enteuksis*, verb *entunhano*) is an action meant for meeting with somebody to discuss and solve a problem; it has two vectors. The first one is vertical and it suggests the presence at the Heavenly Counsel, where not only the global matters of the universe are discussed, but problems of every mortal. The second one is horizontal; it suggests active social involvement of people.

⁶⁰ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985), 401-402.

⁶¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 19.

⁶² In the context of this article the author limited himself to a brief analysis of the word "intercessor" in the New Testament. More detailed information on the meaning of the word "intercessor" in OT and NT can be found in the thesis.

The first level includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or the Divine Trinity. Such kind of meetings with God (*enteuksis*), translated in the Synodal version as “*khodataistvo*,” (intercession) applied only to Christ and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26, 27, 34; Heb. 7:25). Only God, in His omnipotence foreseeing the future, can make the final decision about what means to use to develop the events for the benefits of the person and those around (Jer. 29:11). Sometimes those means can include sufferings, illness and even death (Job; Heb. 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:1; Rev. 14:13).

The Bible also has a description of the extended Councils which are attended by other celestial beings. But those texts do not mention any intercession for somebody. For example, the Book of Job describes how “one day the angels (*Hebrew the sons of God*) came to present themselves before the LORD” (Job 1:6). Presenting themselves to God has never been forbidden, except for some special cases (see Lev. 16:2). We have already mentioned in the previous chapters how Abraham discussed with God the number of the saved in Sodom. In the text from the Book of Job mentioned above, there is no a single word about intercession of the angels for the fate of the sufferer, probably because they fully trusted the decision of Yahweh. Whether He discussed with them the details of His plan is not clear from the text. But it is obvious that there are some topics that are discussed exclusively inside the Trinity. “Even the angels were not permitted to share the counsels between the Father and the Son when the plan of salvation was laid. And human beings are not to intrude into the secrets of the Most High.”⁶³

The second vector the word *enteuksis* goes assumes an active social participation of people themselves. In his epistle to the Corinthians Paul writes, “Ye also helping together by prayer for us that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means

⁶³ Ellen White. *The Ministry of Healing*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/mh/mh36.html> (January 18, 2015).

of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.” (2 Cor. 1:11) (KJV). In this passage of his epistle Paul emphasizes “the gift” (*harizma*)⁶⁴ which is given “by the means of many persons”. This gift could be any practical, specific help of people, who were not indifferent to the mission of Paul. That could be the funds that were collected by the faithful and then passed to the apostle and other ministers of the Gospel, e.g. the believers in Philippians did that (Phil. 4:15-16). That could be bold, decisive actions performed by the close circle of people, sometimes at the risk of their life, “They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul" ... But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul” (Acts 23:14, 16).

The influence of people in the society could also provide substantial support. Someone could say a word to the “rulers of this world” as Claudius Lysias did, when he wrote a letter to the governor Felix (Acts 24:17-25).

When Paul wrote to Timothy “that requests, prayers, intercession (*enteuksis*) and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (1 Tim. 2:1), probably he meant practical, specific assistance provided to people.

As it was mentioned earlier, this kind of intercession was performed by bishops in the early Church. History knows many examples when those brave men were actively involved in the life of their flock. We have already mentioned how Augustine often interceded for the transgressors to Macedonius, the ruler of Africa. Martin of Tours petitioned to the Emperor Maximus for the imprisoned Priscillianists in 384-385 AD. The bishop Flavian of Antioch in 387 AD pleaded the Emperor Theodore I for residents of Antioch, who thoughtlessly destroyed the statue of the emperor in the city.

⁶⁴ The 27th edition of the Greek New Testament by Nestle-Aland

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

You cannot get acquainted with God in a hurry. He is not giving His advice and gifts here and there to people who just pass Him by. The secret of knowing God lies in frequency of spending time with Him and the impact left on a person after that.

When Jesus was preaching, He often said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28), thus He encouraged thoughtful listening and acting. Those whom Christ called “Mine” should have a high ability of hearing God, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). The other group of people is called “stubborn” and constantly afflicted with God’s punishment; they are not accustomed to hear God’s voice, though uttering a pray regularly, “The Lord says: “These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me” (Isa. 29:13).

Søren Kierkegaard, a famous Danish philosopher and Protestant theologian, once said, “One man was praying, and firstly he thought that praying is speaking. But then he became less and less talkative, and finally he realized that to pray means to listen.”⁶⁵ This prayer discussion does not diminish our opinion and point of view on different things and events in the world. But like in a conversation with a parent or an expert of any field, we leave *them* the last word. We are interested in *their* opinion. Then, taking into account their opinion, we make our own conclusions and decide how to act.

⁶⁵ Søren Kierkegaard. *Christian Discourses* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007), 324.

The ability to hear God in intercessory prayer should lead an intercessor to readiness to share the burden of another person. Douglas Hall in his book *When You Pray* describes the essence of intercessory prayer, “The two things are inseparable: You cannot have the joy without bearing the burden.”⁶⁶ In bearing the burden he did not mean the mere mention of global problems or superficial acquaintance with them. Hall focuses on a serious study of issues which Christians want to help to solve.

How much do you really know about Central America? Have you ever been in Nicaragua? Have you listened with an open mind to some of the many groups of Christians in North America who have been there? Or have you only heard, with half an ear, the television reports about that country? What sort of study have you undertaken – perhaps with other people in your congregation – about the various aspects of the environmental crisis, the pollution of fresh water systems, the threat to the ozone layer of our atmosphere, and so forth? How many unemployed persons, battered mothers and children, depressed and unwanted senior citizens have you actually come close to?⁶⁷

According to Hall, involvement in different situations should include three aspects: prayer, meditation, and actions that are specified by Dietrich Bonhoeffer as “legal components of the overall process in Christian society.”⁶⁸

If people come to the solution of some problems with the willingness to take part in the process, God will open tremendous opportunities for them and give advice in prayer concerning participation and application of their skills according to possibilities. The Bible does not mention about Jesus dividing the disciples into two groups: one would go and preach, and the other would stay and pray for them. The one, who preaches, prays. The one, who prays should serve as a preacher, a teacher, a comforter, etc. It is impossible to have successful ministry without prayer, without discussing with God goals, plans, or a scope of one’s ministry. Only God can give the

⁶⁶ Hall, *When You Pray*, 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 86-87.

⁶⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (N.Y.: Macmillan publishing Co, 1967), 300.

qualitative component to the ministry. On the other hand, you cannot just pray without serving. Prayer has an integral logical continuation which is accomplished in ministry. Prayer and ministry are two sides of the same coin. Ellen White writes, “He who does nothing but pray will soon cease to pray, or his prayers will become a formal routine.”⁶⁹

When Paul writes about his apostolic call, he also emphasizes this indissoluble connection between prayer and ministry, “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong” (Rom. 1:9-11).

In other words, Paul, whenever possible, supported believers either by his presence that was not easy at that time, or through his messages which he sent in the epistles. When Paul was reported that in the Corinthian church “there is sexual immorality ...and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans” (1 Cor. 5:1), he reacts immediately in his epistle known to us as the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. In the epistle he gives practical advice and guidance what to do in such the situation. Most likely, before writing Paul prayed and asked God for wisdom and advice as did Samuel, David, Christ. When Paul learns about the problem between the runaway slave Onesimus and his master Philemon, he writes a letter using all his skills of diplomacy, so that Philemon does not have a single reason not to forgive the runaway slave and take him back.

These examples show that Paul's intercessory prayer was filled with a practical component when he became a partaker of the problem-solving process, but

⁶⁹ Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/sc/sc11.html> (January 18, 2013).

not just a repeater, who transmitted requests to God. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Thessalonians, “Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith” (1Thess. 3:10). Again we see the same style: not just “night and day praying most earnestly that God would solve your problem,” but “that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” It is this practical ministry of Paul that led Christianity to spreading rapidly around the world. His letters and personal involvement had a tremendous impact even on people who had never seen him, “I want you to know how much I am struggling... for all who have not met me personally” (Col. 1:29; 2:1).

The principle “Here am I. Send me!” (Is. 6:8) applies also in the Heavens. When the universal tragedy took place and Christ revealed to the angels the plan of salvation where His death was the key element, «the angels prostrated themselves before him. They offered their lives. Jesus said to them that he should by his death save many; that the life of an angel could not pay the debt. His life alone could be accepted of his Father as a ransom for man.”⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that the angels did not get together for prayer to ask God for the salvation of humanity, “The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth,”⁷¹ but the angels offered their concrete help.

Jesus Christ telling about His mission also emphasized *fulfilling* of God’s will, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me”; “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me” (John 4:34; 6:38; 17:4). To hear God’s will, Jesus “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16). Sometime He was doing that a whole night (Luke 6:12).

⁷⁰ Ellen White. *Spiritual Gifts*. <http://text.egwwritings.org/publication.php?pubtype=Book&bookCode=1SG&pagenumber=24> (January 18, 2013).

⁷¹ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp4.html> (January 18, 2013).

In English the word *intercession* is from a Latin word which means “*to make a step which will lead you into the center of the situation.*” It starts with actions, not with words. Christ is the Intercessor and High Priest for the universe, because when He became a man, He was able to see the situation from inside; and as the Son of God and Son of Man He was able to lift up His prayers to the Father. Christ’s prayer, which He began in the Garden of Gethsemane in secret, alone with the Father, had finished publicly at Calvary (Jn. 19:30). Douglas Hall notices, “In Gethsemane He bowed to the will of the Father. On Calvary He acted out that will.”⁷²

There are situations when the problem does not have a logical explanation (John 9:1-3) and God does not explain the cause-effect connection to people, because He knows limitation of human abilities to comprehend and grasp the depth and complexity of what is going on. In this case, faith and humbleness are important. We humble ourselves because we are not able to grasp, and we believe because He controls the situation (Isa. 46:10).

Thus, if we sum up briefly, we can conclude the following: the Bible characters not just reminded God in prayer what He should do, but actively participated in His plans. They were in the center of a drama and used a whole range of their talents and skills. John the Baptist is called a “voice of one calling in the desert” (Matt. 3:3), not a “voice of one calling to God.” His mission was to *fulfill* God’s will, but not to *remind* Him about His will.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER AND FASTING

Esther Fasting

⁷² Hall, *When You Pray*, 125.

Sometimes, a prayer can be an expression of joy and trust of the community, which feels God's love and praises mercy and power of Yahweh, Who changes their life. But more often prayer is a loud cry for help that lives deep inside so that no one could hear it. It is an expression of the most urgent need and screaming for help in unbearable circumstances. Sometimes this loud cry is accompanied with fasting.

The story recorded in the book of Esther amazes with deep tragedy and crisis that struck the Israeli nation. In this brief narration the reason for the cry, accompanied by fasting and prayer, was the decree of King Xerxes to exterminate the Israelites (Esth. 3). Esther asked Mordecai, "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law" (Esth. 4:16). After a brief tension and conflict, which involved all the main characters of the drama, the story ends up happily with restoration of the Israelites in their rights and their future secure existence in the land.

We should pay attention to one important detail of the story – there is no reference pointing to the fact that the initiative for fasting comes from God.

Gerhard J. Botterweck in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* mentions that fasting was widely spread not only in Israel:

The OT contains references to many customs that were used in Israel and among Israel's neighbors to express grief over the death of a close relative or friend or an imminent calamity. Out of grief people tore their clothes, took off their sandals, fasted, gashed themselves, and freely lamented and wept... sprinkled earth or sand on his head. <...> the Moabites, when their cities are destroyed, go on a pilgrimage to the high places of their gods... girded with sackcloth, and they observe a period of mourning (Isa.15:2; Jer.48:29-39). <...> Similarly, in the lament over the fall of Tyre, the inhabitants of the city... gird themselves with mourning clothes (Ezk.27:31).⁷³

⁷³ Gerhard J. Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament: Mourning Customs* (Grand Rapids: Eerd. Publ. Co, 1978. V.3), 10-11. The details of this practice can be found in the book *Theology of the Old Testament* by Paul Heinisch.

Esther was a representative of her nation and absorbed its religious traditions. Some scholars consider that before Esther was born, the Israelites had lived more than a hundred years in the area, where the Persian culture subdued the Chaldean one.⁷⁴ It can be assumed that in Judaism at that time there was some differentiation of religious consciousness and religious practices, and it could make an impact on their spiritual and moral perception.

In *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* we can read the following about fasting practices of the ancient nations, “In practice, fasting in the setting of religious rites and as a defense against trouble was common in the whole of the ancient world. Persians would therefore have thought it strange if the Jews had not called a fast at such a time.”⁷⁵ According to the Commentaries, the fasting of the Israelites could be “the spontaneous reaction of the Jews throughout the Persian empire to bewail the king’s decree (4:3). The mourning, fasting, weeping lamenting and wearing of sackcloth and ashes were genuine expression of dismay at the impending disaster.”⁷⁶

Reading the book of Esther, one cannot miss the details that indicate the true reason for the successful outcome. It is the specific actions of the key characters of the story: Esther, Mordecai, Xerxes and Haman. Of course, God's providence has played an important role in the complexity of the relationships, but it was in the context of the characters’ personal participation. God urged Esther through Mordecai to go to the king and present the problem, though she might have chosen not to go to him. Mordecai, when he heard about the plot against Xerxes, could have kept silent; then

⁷⁴ See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: Esther (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982. V. II), 159

⁷⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin, and Donald J. Wiseman. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Esther: an Introduction and Commentary* (London, Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 1984), 80.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 81

his act of courage would not have been written in the "book of the chronicles" which the king wanted to read in apropos time, "That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes" (Esth. 6:1-2).

We see how God's providence accompanies or precedes the situation. God makes the king sleepless and encourages him to read the "book of the chronicles," knowing that the heroic act of Mordecai is written in it. God urges Esther to appeal to the king, because she has certain influence on him. Thus, God uses a complex and subtle web of circumstances and human relations to carry out His plan. In this case the fast should mobilize human internal ability to hear and understand God's providential guidance.

"The example of Esther may serve to remind the Christian church of the place that fasting has in seeking God's face in a time of crisis," – written in the *Tyndale Commentaries*.⁷⁷

This statement is supported by the authors of *the SDA Bible Commentary*, "The clarity of mind that often results from fasting would prepare her to perceive the will of God and to know how to cooperate intelligently with it."⁷⁸

Thus, if Esther's fasting led her to mobilize her inner powers and get courage to come to the king, then it corresponds to the biblical concept of fasting. But if it was meant as a "protection"⁷⁹ against the conspiracy of Haman, while the goal was to draw

⁷⁷ Ibid, 85

⁷⁸ The Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible: Esther (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 1977. V.4), 477

⁷⁹ Baldwin, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Esther*, 80.

God's attention and mercy, then it was a pagan concept of fast, widely spread in all territories of the ancient world, where the fasting "is often mere superstition, as when men suppose that there is merit in their abstaining on certain days from certain kinds of food... and that God must needs be pleased with that pains or distresses his creatures."⁸⁰

According to *Tyndale Commentaries*, the fast in Israel "was usually for one day [only]. It was obligatory on the Day of Atonement (Lv.16:29-31)."⁸¹

Fasting in Nineveh

The preaching of Jonah in Nineveh was accompanied with a huge success. The Ninevites repented not just using general words and ritual phrases, but they proclaimed the fast (Jonah 3:5-10). It is hard to say whether the fast was a borrowed practice from the Israelites or it was a common practice among Ninevites.

Some scholars see in the ritual elements of repentance, humility and humiliation an effort to appease the God who sent all those calamities on human beings.⁸² *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* says: "Putting ashes or dust on someone's head was a sign of mourning in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This practice was well known in Mesopotamia and Canaan."⁸³

⁸⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary* (London: Funk & Wagnalls Co, 1913), 88. The detailed homiletical analysis of Esther fasting can be read there.

⁸¹ Baldwin, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Esther*, 81.

⁸² See W. Frankenberg, *Israelitische und altarabische Trauerbrauche* (PJ, 1906), 64-74.

⁸³ John H. Walton, Victor Harold Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *Bibleiskiy Kulturno-Istoricheskiy Kommentariy, Vetkhiy Zavet (The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament)* (St. Petersburg: Mirt, 2003), 557-558.

Ernst Kutsch considers the rituals of self-abasement and weeping to be the reflection of the general tradition called a “correction ritual.”⁸⁴

The SDA Bible Commentary mentions Herodotus, describing the accident when “the Persians cut off their own hair and the hair (manes and tails) of their horses and beasts of burden in a time of general mourning.”⁸⁵

The *Anglican Church Commentary* also points out that “the soiling of one’s person with mud, dust, sand, or sometimes even dung, was a very widespread usage in deep sorrow.”⁸⁶

Karl Adam gives the description of this practice by Vergil.⁸⁷ According to Kitto, the ancient pagan people used to deprive animals of food and abstained from eating themselves during mourning and self-humiliation.⁸⁸

The most important part of the whole story is recorded by the prophet Jonah in Chapter 3, “When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened” (Jonah 3:10). In addition to their repentance the acts of Ninevites especially turning “from their evil ways” determined their fate. John Chrysostom in his commentary on the fast in Nineveh points to Jonah 3:10 as a key text:

So, what saved those Ninevites? On their spiritual wounds they laid the strict fast, . . . prostrating and changing their lifestyle. Let us see which of the medicines healed them. The prophet says, “*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the*

⁸⁴ Ernst Kutsch. *The Ugaritic Parallel in CTA*, 34 f. AB, VI, 11-22.

⁸⁵ The Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary: The Holy Bible: Jonah (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing, 1977. V.4), 1005

⁸⁶ Cook, *The Holy Bible, According to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611)*, 598

⁸⁷ Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, the Text Carefully Printed from the Most Correct Copies of the Present Authorized Translation, Including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts: With a Commentary and Critical Notes Designed As a Help to a Better Understanding of the Sacred Writings* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 704.

⁸⁸ Spence-Jones, *The Pulpit Commentary*, 67.

destruction he had threatened” (Jonah 3:10). It is not said that “*God saw the fast of the Ninevites, sack-clothes and ashes.*” I say this not to reject the fast – far from it! But to convince you to do what is better than the fast. That is abstaining from all evil.”⁸⁹

Other Examples of Fasting in the Bible

Since the practice of fasting accompanied by crying and weeping was widely spread among nations of Mesopotamia and Canaan, apparently Queen Jezebel specially included it in her sinister plan against Naboth to overtake his land, “In those letters she wrote: “Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death.” ... They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people” (1 Kgs. 21:9-10, 12). Perhaps in this case the fast was used to give the weight to the matter and dispel the doubts of people regarding the fairness of the decision.

It is possible that the practice of appeasing deities during fasting migrated to Israel.⁹⁰ Perhaps, because of that the Lord rebuked His people through the prophet, “Is this the kind of fast I have chosen?” (Isa. 58:5).

“When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted? And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?” (Zech. 7:4-6).

These texts show that God did not favor their fasting. Zechariah explains why, “This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.” (Zech. 7:9-10).

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *Selected Interviews*, 33.

⁹⁰ Regarding the connection between the fast of the Ninevites and Israelites see Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Jonah* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc, 1984. V.X), 407-410

The Babylonian captivity was the result of a breach of the covenant with God and it led to social problems. The Israelites were fasting for seventy years, but never changed, “But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears” (Zech. 7:11). Through the prophet God urged the Israelites to analyze the reason of their moral degradation (Zech. 1:4). Receiving “clarity of mind that often results from fasting”,⁹¹ the Israelites probably could have seen the depth of their tragedy, but they ascribed to the fast a different meaning and were criticized by Yahweh for that.

According to John Chrysostom, the fast is necessary as a “means of cleansing mind and lightening soul,”⁹² to better hear God’s voice calling to our mind. “The light vessels cross the sea quicker, but the loaded ones rather go down. The same is about the fast which makes our mind lighter and empowers it to cross the sea of life, running towards the heavens and heavenly objects.”⁹³ Fasting for God means a deep analysis of one's internal moral condition.

The prophet Joel when writing about fasting focuses primarily on the restoration of close relationships with God, “‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:12-13).

When Jesus was asked why His disciples did not fast, He answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast” (Matt. 9:15). According

⁹¹ The Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary (1977), V.4, 477

⁹² John Chrysostom, *Selected Interviews*, 27.

⁹³ Ibid.

to *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, though, Jesus fasted before He went for His mission and suggested His disciples to do the same, “he did not expect them to fast while he was with them (Mt.9:15). The bridegroom was indeed taken away from them, and for a short time they fasted, but the resurrection ushered in the new era of rejoicing and they would never again be desolate (Jn.14:18).”⁹⁴

In other words, while the Bridegroom is with you and you have constant communication with Him, there is no need for fasting. But if the contact with the Bridegroom or His representative (John 14:16) is lost, then you will need the fast as a means for mobilizing the internal perception for re-establishing the link.

Thus, it can be concluded that the mere fact of fasting has no interest for God, if it is not accompanied with righteous deeds and just actions. Yet, it should be mentioned that “the idea of gaining merit by fasting persisted and hardened into an element of piety, which together with almsgiving and prayer drew the commentary of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. (Mt.6:1-18).”⁹⁵

PRAYER GROUPS AND INTERCESSORY PRAYER

As we have mentioned earlier, the evolution of intercessory prayer has passed a long way of reforms and was formed with a lot of layers of different cultures and worldviews. It is impossible to ascertain what the intercessory prayer was like during times of the pre-flood world, the first patriarchs or even the early Israel, due to the scarcity of material describing it. In this chapter we will touch on a “prayer group” as an institution, because it is hard to imagine intercessory prayer in many Christian churches without it.

⁹⁴ *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Esther (1984)*, 84

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 83

In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church developed the concept of continuous supplication which involved new institutions such as prayer groups and even prayer schools. Their main objective was developing and nurturing the idea of intercessory prayer in minds of the believers. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Prayer groups and “prayer schools” are the signs and the means of the Church prayer practice renewal nowadays.”⁹⁶

Prayer groups can be found in every Christian denomination. The details of their intercessory ministry may vary, but functions are similar. Peter Wagner writes that “God’s power is released in the process of intercession.”⁹⁷

Douglas Hall mentions that for some Christians the true prayer is characterized by a well-organized, professional and long speech, mixed with formal phrases to add smoothness to it. “Apparently the important thing in prayer is not thought, but sincerity. And sincerity, it appears, is not available in one’s study at the typewriter, but only on Sunday morning at eleven, in the midst of congregation, on the spot.”⁹⁸

Sometimes after a prayer group’s intercession people get healed, family problems are solved, the gospel ministry flourishes. But sometimes the result can be quite the reverse: no healing, no reconciliation and no gospel preaching. Someone can say that in the second case people are lacking faith. I cannot agree with that, because many of praying people are sincere believers.

Jesus Christ often compared relationships between God and people with relationships between father and son; there are many such allusions in His parables (Matt. 5:9, 45; 7:9; 21:28; Luke 6:35, etc.). The Lord’s Prayer starts with the words

⁹⁶ *Katekhizis Katolicheskoi Tserkvi (The Catechism of the Catholic Church)* (Moscow: Cultural Center “Dukhovnoe Nasledie”, 2001), 623.

⁹⁷ Wagner, *Prayer Shield*, c.23

⁹⁸ Hall, *When You Pray*, 98-99

“Our Father in heaven.” These illustrations help better understand God’s character and principles He uses to build relations with His creatures. A father, seeing sufferings of his child, takes actions immediately, and for that, he does not need to summon family members and friends for pushing him to act. Sometimes children do not even understand that they need help, but a wise parent is the first one to come towards them to provide the assistance. If we, mortal beings, are willing to sacrifice the most precious thing we have for the sake of our kids, all the more our heavenly Father, who is the incarnation of love (1 John 4:8), is willing to do this. He foresees all human problems and troubles, and does whatever is possible to make people happy. He does not need to be begged for that by a group of people.

The Bible has many examples of God's intervention in situations, when He meets a person face to face and acts in spite the absence of any group request (Gen. 22:11; Exod. 3:4; Josh. 10:12; John 4:7). Moreover, as it was mentioned before, the initiative of intervention comes from God, not from man. It is God Himself, not people, begs to listen (Deut. 4:1; 5:1; 5:27; 6:3; 12:18; Ps. 81:9; Is. 28:14), think (Prov. 4:26; Jer. 9:17; Matt. 5:17), learn (Ps. 2:10; Is. 1:17; Matt. 9:13; 11:29), stop (Ps. 46:11; Jer. 6:16) or start acting (2 Chron. 19:9). For that reason God sends visions and gives revelations (Num. 12:6), sometimes speaks directly to people (Gen. 3:9; Exod. 20:1), appears as the Angel (Exod. 23:21) or uses any other means to reach people (Num. 22:30; Luke 21:11).

Douglas Hall considers that prayer of many biblical characters “was thought and their thought was prayer... But this changed rather rapidly with the waning of the Middle Ages... [when] thinking and praying began to be separated from each other in a quite decisive way.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Hall, *When You Pray*, 109.

Summarizing his analysis of intercessory prayer, Hall writes:

Certainly it is not just a matter of naming names. Someone says to you, “Please remember me in your prayers,” and so, next time you are in church or at your private devotions you say, dutifully enough, “... and please, God, remember X...” You may go on to mention what X’s problem is. Similarly, in church services we sometimes are subjected to long lists of first names whom we are to “remember before God.” <...> But if individual Christians or congregations think that they have discharged their responsibilities as a priestly people when they have offered up such lists and reminders to God, they are surely missing some dimension of biblical faith. <...> That we can regard such remembering as intercession is, of course, symptomatic of a larger malaise by which contemporary, one-dimensional humanity is afflicted.¹⁰⁰

Then Hall adds, that there is an impression that those, who intercede in such a way, are in a different boat. If we ask to sustain a poor, should not we meet that person at the door of our house? “Christian prayer is intercessory because it is a prayer of priestly people, a people being brought into holy solidarity with all creatures. <...> those whom we remember in prayer are not in another ship – they are fellow passengers on a fragile craft. We are accountable for their journey.”¹⁰¹

Active participation is not an easy thing; it requires an extra time, efforts and energy. However, people need practical help in their problems and needs, rather than readdressing these concerns to God. Right here prayer is a unifying link between thought and act. When the prophet Isaiah heard about troubles of his people, he answered to God, “Here am I. Send me!” Metropolitan Anthony said, “Send me into the core of the situation; I will go and stand there, and I will stay as long as it lasts.”¹⁰² Only such attitude can be called intercession, because intercessory prayer is a guarantee. We cannot pray sincerely for those, whom we are not ready to help.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Metropolitan Anthony, *School of prayer*, 389-390.

Doctor Rieux, a main character of a novel *The Plague* by Albert Camus, said, “It is easier to be a hero than a saint.”¹⁰³ A heroic gesture is transient, but public; that is why it is considered to be heroic. Actions of the saint are less visible, but last much longer. You do not need to make much effort to pray at the moment of emergency, but you have to make efforts to pray daily, throughout life.

The Bible does not mention that God has established a certain group of people, “prayer worriers,” who can plead Him for good weather, health or well-being of a nation. Jesus also did not give any directions about establishing a “prayer institution” to help the apostles to preach the Gospel, heal the sick and release the demon possessed. The one, who preached, he was praying, and vice versa.

When Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, He did not give a command to the believers to join into groups and plead with God for the deliverance. He also did not direct His disciples to beg the Lord for mercy when “will be famines and earthquakes in various places” (Matt. 24:7). Instead Jesus called “take heart” (John 16:33), “do not let your hearts be troubled.” (John 14:1). He urged the disciples to trust in God, when there was no logical explanation of the problem. Thus, He made it clear that God controlled any situation. When God needed someone for specific assistance in solving a problem, He always appealed directly to the person. Sometimes, for that He met personally with the chosen one (Judges 6:11; Isa. 6:8; Acts 9). Sometimes, He communicated His will to a person through other people who could hear Him and transmit the message.

Very often, to leave the last word to God, people supplement their prayers with phrase “Thy will be done.” Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline* writes:

¹⁰³ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 92.

The most amazing in Jesus prayers *for others* (emphasis added) is the absence of the phrase “Thy will be done” at the end. Neither the Apostles nor prophets have ever said that phrase for others. They absolutely believed that the will of God is known to them, even before they prayed the prayer of faith. They were so much filled with the Holy Spirit which aided them to meet different human challenges that they knew for sure what to do. Their prayer was full of so much confidence that it often took the form of a direct requirement to “walk” or “get up”. When they prayed for others, it was not an attempt to try God “Maybe You will be done.” ¹⁰⁴

The concept of a prayer group really unites a church and helps to solve many problems. But, if someone has a broken car, that person will ask a mechanic to pray to God for wisdom to repair it, or if you need some help to buy a real estate you probably invite to your prayer group a realtor or a specialist in this area. It is unlikely that the problem can be successfully resolved by a person or a group of people, who are incompetent in it, but merely present the case to God aloud. ¹⁰⁵

ANSWERED AND UNANSWERED PRAYERS

There are many stories in the Bible when prophets or apostles prayed for healing or even resurrection of the dead, and those prayers were heard and answered (2 Kgs. 4, 5; Acts 3; 9:40, etc.). The Christian prayer practice has adopted the biblical model of “answered prayer” in their intercessory praying for the sick or in other cases, when the divine intervention is necessary.

But the Bible describes other cases also, when people did not receive answers to their petitions (Jer. 7:16; 14:12; 2 Sam. 12:15-18) though the ratio of “unanswered prayers” is lower. This small percentage of “unanswered” prayers could be explained by the fact that the authors of the biblical books did not set a goal to describe all the

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ More detailed information of the service of the prayer group in pastoral practice of the author can be read in the thesis, in the chapter “Practical Application Of Intercessory Prayer In The Seventh-Day Adventist Church”

cases in the life of Israel. Only the key events were recorded to help reveal more fully the relationship between God and humans in the biblical context. First of all, the authors of the Bible mentioned the cases in which the nature of God's presence and participation in the history of mankind were revealed.

The terms "unanswered" and "answered" prayers are deliberately enclosed in quotes, because for the author there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer or a prayer without God's answer. It is written, "Call to me and I will answer you" (Jer. 33:3). The problem is that people sometimes confuse such concepts as "unanswered prayer" and "non-satisfied request," substituting one for the other.

Christ taught people to apply to God in prayer as to a father, "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). Loving father, even if his child has committed the most disgusting act, will never refuse to listen to his explanation and talk to him. As it has been mentioned before, prayer is a dialogue with the Interlocutor, who always hears. Thus "unanswered prayer" happens only for those, who do not ask God any questions or do not find time to listen to His answers.

The better understanding of the difference between "answered" and "unanswered" prayers comes when we trace their connection with the mission, that Christ and the Apostles had, i.e. preaching of the Gospel. Such preaching was accompanied or usually preceded by exorcism and healing, or at the request of the apostles God smote some people with various illnesses:

Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. (Acts 13:9-12).

This example shows that the proconsul had to see the supernatural act that God had done through the apostle Paul before he believed in what Paul taught, “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.” John Grey says that “It is a feature of the tradition of the authentication of the divine authority of a prophet by a ‘sign’, or token of God’s immediate activity”,¹⁰⁶ that is why people treated such an elect as a heavenly messenger.

It should be mentioned that it was not Paul begging the Holy Spirit to convert the proconsul into Christian faith, but the Holy Spirit guided Paul, “Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit ...said ...”

There are many examples in the Bible when God solved someone's problems at the request of other people. But more often we read about situations, when the suppliant had limited knowledge of God and His laws (Exod. 8:28, 2 Kgs. 4, 5). In other cases God raised the authority of His servants, who carried out His commission through miracles (Mark 16:17, Acts 3). At the request of his apostles God healed the sick, cast out demons, thus showing the people around that behind the disciples was the Almighty. So the message they proclaimed was stamped by the Heaven. It was a part of the evangelistic project. God was rising up the credibility of His followers in the eyes of the society around them. In Old Testament times God raised the authority of His prophets in the same way.

Jesus promised His disciples that they would heal the sick and cast out demons in the context of the Gospel preaching, “As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons” (Matt. 10:7-8, Luke 10:9). The New Testament does not

¹⁰⁶ Gray, *I and II Kings*, 401-402.

mention any of Christ's disciples asking another one to intercede before God for his healing, forgiveness of sins, or some other problems. We can hardly imagine that, for example, the Apostle Peter during his conversations with Andrew would ask the latter to come to Jesus and present a request to heal Peter's mother-in-law. People came to *Jesus*, looked for *Jesus*, that *He, Jesus* would deal with their problems. Only after Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the Father, the apostles became His representatives on earth, but not His substitutes. They represented Jesus to those, who did not know Him. Yet, it is promised to God's people that "no longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Heb. 8:11).

If, according to Samuel Balentine, a prayer is an "intercourse ... which helps to grow and develop,"¹⁰⁷ or means giving a possibility to apply to God with a request, so there is no such a person who is rejected to receive God's response. The modern society attributes to its achievements a human right to freely express their opinion. We call it a freedom of speech. But this right is appreciated by God even more. And when a society tramples this right, prayer can become a kind of a safety-valve, which helps make up for the loss of expressing one's thoughts. There is the One, who always is ready to listen, and what is more, to give good advice.

As Karl Barth said, "God is not deaf, He hears; in fact, He acts."¹⁰⁸

THE CONCEPT OF INTERCESSION IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Early Christianity promoted the idea of priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9), when "each one should use whatever gift he has received" (1 Pet. 4:10), and

¹⁰⁷ Samuel E. Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 228.

¹⁰⁸ Karl Barth, *Prayer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 13.

prayer was an integral component for any Christian. But in 747 AD Pope Zachary in a letter to majordomo Pepin suggested that laymen and soldiers had to defend the country, but the clergy had to give advice and to pray.¹⁰⁹ By the beginning of the XI century AD the world had already been well-ordered and divided into classes, where everyone had to do their own work in accordance with the established formula: “people have to work, knights – to fight, and clergy – to pray.”¹¹⁰

Romano Guardini (1885-1968), a Catholic theologian and influential social and religious figure of the beginning of the 19th century, wrote:

The term ‘saint’ has changed greatly in the course of the centuries. In the context of the New Testament it included all those who believed in Christ, who were reborn by baptism ...– in other words, all Christians. However, with the growing number of the faithful, the meaning of the word ‘saint’ was narrowed down, and more and more was applied to denote something exceptional, which revealed itself (through the call and guidance of God) in the form of an absolute devotion and in greatness of experience and action, in certain individuals... The saints show us the way to Christ... They are the explorers in the Kingdom of God, the discoverers of his magnitude and power.¹¹¹

First of all the priests were those “explorers in the Kingdom of God”. Empowered to regulate the spiritual life of the faithful, they acquired a unique position for their parishioners, as well as an extraordinary control over their minds. As a result these “religious guides” were authorized to perform the sacraments and special prayers for people’s salvation. Ultimately, the division of the believers to the laity and clergy led to the fact that the priests were given the power to forgive sins,

Since Christ entrusted to His apostles the ministry of reconciliation, their successors – bishops and presbyters, the helpers of bishops, – continue this ministry. Indeed, the bishops and presbyters, due to the Sacrament of Orders, have the power to forgive sins “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”... Individual and

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Svechin, *Evolutsiya Voennogo Iskustva (Evolution of Military Art)*, Vol.1 (Moscow: Kniga po Vostrebvaniyu, 1928), 98.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Romano Guardini. *Prayer in Practice* (N.Y: Pantheon Books, 1957), 185-186, 190

complete confession of grave sins, followed by absolution, remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and the Church.¹¹²

In 1418 AD the Council of Constance reaffirmed the need to confess to a priest, and the famous Council of Trent (1545-1563 AD) proclaimed the sacrament of confession to be the divine law declaring anathema to everyone who would dare to deny that claim. "In order to refute the Protestant teachings of Martin Luther and Juan Calvin it was recognized that a mortal sin could not be forgiven without a secret confession in the presence of the priest."¹¹³

People believed that intercessory prayer of priests was able to propitiate God. So people were coming to them to get through their prayers whatever they needed for a calm and serene life. The biblical "foundation" was given to the priestly intercessory prayer thus making it an integral part of a church service. "After the sermon that calls to accept the heard Word, which is the true Word of God, and apply it to life, comes intercessory prayer for all people as the response to the words of the Apostle, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1Tim. 2:1-2)."¹¹⁴

The Second Vatican Council decided to "re-establish "public prayer" or prayer of the faithful after the Gospel and preaching, especially on Sundays and on public holidays, in order to offer prayers with the participation of all the people for the

¹¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 353.

¹¹³ Oleg E. Dushin, *Ispoved' i Sovest' v Zapadnoevropeiskoi Kultureh XIII-XVI vekov: Avtoreferat Dis... doctor filos. Nauk (Confession and Conscience in the West European Culture of 13th-16th Centuries. PhD Dissertation Author's Abstract)* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg State University, 2005), 39.

¹¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2001), 619.

holy Church, those in power, the burdened with various needs, for all mankind and for the salvation of the whole world.”¹¹⁵

The practice of intercessory prayer continued to evolve; the new institutions were established in the Church – “prayer groups” and even “prayer schools” – which are designed to nurture and develop the concept of intercession in minds of believers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “Prayer groups and “prayer schools” are the sign of prayer renewal in the Church of our time.”¹¹⁶

Defining “*to intercede*” and “*mediator*”, the Catholic Church implies a new functional meaning into these terms “To intercede is to go or come between two parties, to plead before one of them on behalf of the other. In the New Testament it is used as the equivalent of *entunhanein* (Vulg. *interpellare* in Heb.7:25). “Mediation” means a standing in the midst between two (contending) parties, for the purpose of bringing them together (cf. *mediator, mesites*, 1Tim.2:5).”¹¹⁷

In the Catholic ecclesiology both words are used in the context of intervention or mediation of Christ, first of all, then the Virgin Mary, the angels and saints in favor of people, “we pray to the holy angels and to men... that by their prayers and merits our prayers may be efficacious (Apocal.8:4).”¹¹⁸

During the Reformation the Protestant churches have responded to the Catholic doctrine of intercession of the saints with the strong attack. In the Augsburg Confession the Lutherans specified their position the following way, “the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the

¹¹⁵ *Dokumenty Vtorogo Vatikanskogo Sobora (The Document of the Second Vatican Council)* (Moscow: Paolineh, 1998), 53.

¹¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2001), 623.

¹¹⁷ The Catholic Encyclopedia: Intercession. (London: The Encyclopedia Press Inc.,1913.V.VIII),70

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayers.”¹¹⁹

In the 22d Articles of the Anglican Church it is written, “The Romish doctrine concerning the Invocation of Saints is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.”¹²⁰

When Ellen White wrote about prayer ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, she noted that prayer meetings should emphasize some practical help to others and teaching in the group, “What is the object of assembling together? Is it to inform God, to instruct Him by telling Him in prayer all we know? We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another's hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the Source of our strength.”¹²¹

This concept of prayer meetings makes this ministry socially oriented, when everyone can “use whatever gift he has received to serve others” (1 Pet. 4:10).

Ellen White also edified people to look for answers to their questions from God, not people, no matter how “holy” they are, “When perplexities arise, and difficulties confront you, look not for help of humanity. Trust God in everything. The practice of telling our difficulties to others only makes us weak, and brings no strength to them. It lays upon them the burden of our spiritual infirmities, which they

¹¹⁹ The Augsburg Confession" art. 21, sects. 2,3 <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php> (May 19, 2013)

¹²⁰ The Catholic Encyclopedia: Intercession. (London: The Encyclopedia Press Inc.,1913.V.VIII),71

¹²¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*. http://www.gilead.net/egw/books/testimonies/Testimonies_for_the_Church_Volume_Two/ (January 21, 2014).

cannot relieve. We seek the strength from erring, finite man, when we might have the strength from the unerring, infinite God.”¹²²

TWO PATTERNS OF INTERCESSION

Because in the Bible God is often compared with a physician, let us consider two models of behavior of a person, who comes to a doctor to intercede for the patient.

The first model – instructions for a doctor

A visitor comes to a doctor as an “intercessor”, and starts pleading him about a sick person in the hospital, “Doctor, you know that there is a patient N in your hospital. You know how painful it is to have a stomach ulcer. I hope you will not neglect this sick woman. Please, doctor, instruct the nurses to do their job efficiently. Do not forget to prescribe her antibiotics, especially of that new company; I heard that they are very effective. Use all your knowledge received at the university. And remember, doctor, that you gave the Hippocratic Oath, in the name of which I ask you about all these things.” After that the person leaves the hospital with clear conscience, because the “intercession” for the patient was performed.

The second model – personal participation

The same situation, the same “intercessor,” but this time he has another request. “Doctor, there is a patient N in your hospital. I am not a specialist in medicine. Actually, I am a constructor. That is why I have only one question – what can I do for the sick lady *personally* to help her? I’m sure, you keep everything under control, but still how can I help you?” Probably, the doctor will say “We really keep everything under control. But a nurse got sick and we are short of hospital attendants.

¹²² Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/col/col12.html>. (January 21, 2014).

Could you be on duty at the bed of the sick on Tuesday? Also the lady said that she is a vegetarian, but we cannot cook any special food for her. The hospital robe is too big for her. Could you hem this one? Also we cannot provide much entertainment. Could you bring her some books to read?”

After such a dialogue the “mediator” comes with the list of needs to the congregation and recounts them all that he heard from the doctor. And then everyone, after measuring their abilities and resources, can participate: whether hemming the robe, sitting by the bed, etc. We know that when it comes to health, people are more interested in what the *doctor* said, not what was said *to* the doctor. There are some areas outside our competence, which we cannot and should not interfere in. If I cannot perform a surgery, there is no need to call the surgeon constantly and remind him what and how he should do. First of all, intercessory prayer is necessary to the applicant to teach the human a very important principle of the universe – “everyone lives for the benefit of others.”¹²³

Due to the lack of close relationships with God, some people need a "spiritual mentor", and this is natural. Everyone, to a certain degree, affects other people around him. The concept of "spiritual mentoring" can be seen in the Bible (Titus 2:3; Eph. 6:4; 1 Thess. 5:14). Very often “mentors” are guides to God for those who are just getting acquainted with Him. In the spiritual mentoring two models can be distinguished:

A Secretary at Reception

Let us imagine a person who has an appointment with a president to deliver him a petition. A secretary is waiting for the individual at the reception. Having listened carefully to the visitor, he soothes him/her saying that he *himself* will take

¹²³ Ellen White. *The Desire of Ages*, 6. <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/da/dapreface.html> (January 22, 2014).

care of everything. The secretary invites the visitor to sit and wait, while he opens the massive double door with a plate where it is written in big golden letters
PRESIDENT, and disappears behind it. The visitor is waiting, fidgeting in the chair, worrying about what is happening behind the mysterious door that evokes awe and fear. He/she has never entered that door, but heard lots of times that mere mortals are not allowed to come in. Time passes and the happy secretary comes out, rubbing his hands gleefully, "Everything is fine. The PRESIDENT ordered the specialist to take care of your problem." Of course, the visitor bursts out with grateful exclamations. He/she does not know how to express the gratitude to the attentive and faithful secretary, who, waving his hand, modestly says that it is his usual work. So the visitor leaves the reception without seeing PRESIDENT. But he/she has met the *secretary*, who has access to him. Since then the visitor will start recommending this *secretary* to his friends and acquaintances.

A Doorkeeper-on- duty

The same situation, the same unhappy visitor with his /her problem, the same massive double door with a tablet PRESIDENT, but instead of a *secretary* there is a *doorkeeper*. After listening to the problem carefully, he disappears behind the door of the PRESIDENT for a while, and then, coming out, he leads the visitor to the mysterious door inviting him to go inside. But the visitor refuses waving his hands and trying to resist in every possible way, "How can I, a mere mortal..." But the doorkeeper politely, yet persistently persuades the visitor to go inside assuring that the PRESIDENT is waiting for him/her. The visitor makes the last attempt begging the doorkeeper, "Maybe you *yourself* describe the problem, you will do it much better" But the doorkeeper answers, "I would be happy, but PRESIDENT wants to meet *you* personally." After some hesitation the visitor goes in, and then, after a while he comes

out with a shining face full of joy – the problem is solved! With all his heart, he gives thanks to the doorkeeper. But now the visitor is going to tell all his friends and acquaintances that he/she *personally* talked with PRESIDENT and how the latter dealt with his problem. Now he/she becomes the doorkeeper who inspires others to go behind that mysterious door, where there is a free access for every mortal.

Unfortunately, in some Christian churches the institute of “doorkeepers” eventually gave way to the institute of “secretaries” or mediators, thus depriving people of the opportunity of a personal meeting with God.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the study of intercessory prayer in the Judea-Christian context, a few points should be highlighted.

1. “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen” (Matt. 6:6). Prayer is a dialogue on the initiative of God. This process has an up-down orientation to it, rather than a down-up one.¹²⁴
2. The objective of the dialogue is not to provide God with the information about our problems or needs, “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans... for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matt. 6:7-8). Like a patient coming to a doctor and listening carefully to the expert, we also have to tune our inner ear to hear the opinion of the Expert.
3. If it is a request for someone's problem, then the implementation of the initiative is encouraged. Intercession implies personal participation and often a sacrifice of time, energy, or resources. Since “every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jas. 1:17), then God, who is able to foresee the future, elects a person to be at

¹²⁴ Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 27.

the right time in the right place. The consent of the person and active involvement are required.

The same way God called Noah to preach to the pre-flood world about a coming disaster. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans to become the father of great nation. The initiative of appointing Moses as the leader of the Israelites also belonged to God. Moses tried to refuse, but it was God who urged him to perform the proposed mission. When God asked, “Whom shall I send?” Isaiah answered, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isa 6:7-8). He probably understood that the call was addressed to him. Before Elijah had taken his bold actions against the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, God would reveal to him the details of His plan. That is why Elijah said, “Let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command” (1 Kgs. 18:36). Apostles, before healing the sick through their prayers, did not get together into a “prayer group” to plead God to hear their prayers. They healed and preached, because they were confident that the Lord gave them that power, “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.'” (Luke 10:9).

Intercessory prayers of the Apostle Paul were well-considered and practical. If he was convinced that the Lord wanted to show through him His special power, then Paul, in the name of Christ, healed people, cast out demons and raised the dead. If the solution of the problem required God’s given gifts and talents, but not a supernatural power, then he used them wisely. Paul traveled, preached, visited Christian communities, instructed the faithful, and that brought on him displeasure of both Jews and Gentiles (1 Cor. 11:25-26).

If Paul could not come personally due to some reasons, he wrote letters in which gave advice to the elders and leaders of the church. Even, being in prison, Paul

was able to find opportunities to write letters (Col. 4:3). We do not see in the Bible examples of how Paul and the other apostles, sitting in their cells, sent to God some prayer impulses – mentally or aloud – to influence the course of the history. The course of history was changed by their actions and deeds. It was that practical principle of ministry which Paul taught others, encouraging them to “teach” (Heb. 3:13), “comfort” (1Thess. 4:18), “rebuke” (Titus 2:15), “devote themselves to doing what is good” (Titus 3:14), at the same time, in prayers, asking God for wisdom.

The tendency to withdraw from the daily routine is obvious in our modern age. A lawyer, after an important court hearing, or a doctor, after a serious operation, goes to their country house trying to retire. Parents look for opportunities to escape their children, thus encouraging the boom of the baby-sitters industry, expansion of summer camps, etc. In the holiday season happy families go to different parts of the world – depending on their income – to escape from daily routine. Prayer also implies abandoning of daily affairs, but with an important difference – keeping in mind the perspective to come back and change something. Prayer which is subject to a syndrome of “closing in one’s own shell” is far from the biblical ideal. The desire to leave, to move away from this world is based on the fact that the world is rapidly losing its original concept of existence. But somebody has to maintain the original design. “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13).

